

The Stores, They are a Changin'

Over the past half-century, I have witnessed a number of changes in the Washington Area. I have seen Arlington grow from being a sleepy bedroom community across the river from a sleepy southern town, to a major metropolitan area abutting the nation's capitol. Unfortunately, not only has the pace of life changed, but driving through my old home town is a pain in the neck.

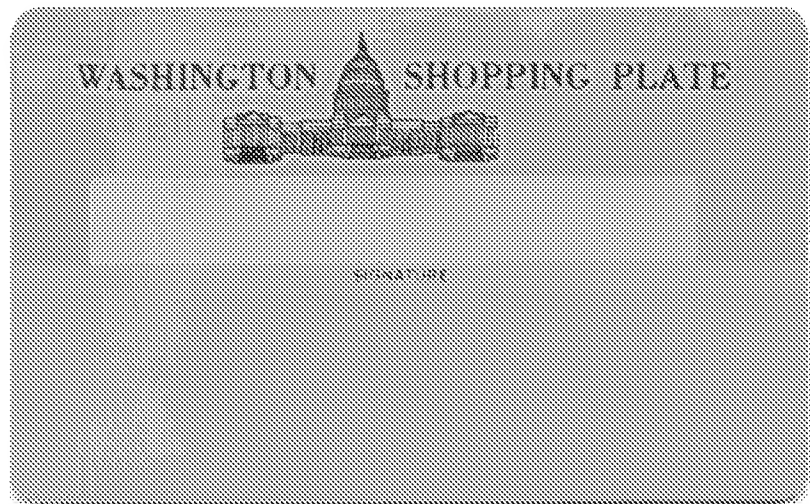
Recently, the latest change was announced - the last of the baseline Washington area department stores is about to bite the dust. The Hecht Company will join the group of defunct stores that once graced the streets of the Washington area.

I remember going "down town" with my mother and brother, on a red AB&W bus, to go shopping during the holidays of the early 1950's. We caught the bus at 20th and Joyce Streets, and got off at the bus station at the old Post Office building at 12th and Pennsylvania Ave. We then visited a number of department stores along F Street, the heart of the shopping district. Those stores are now gone; only the memories remain.

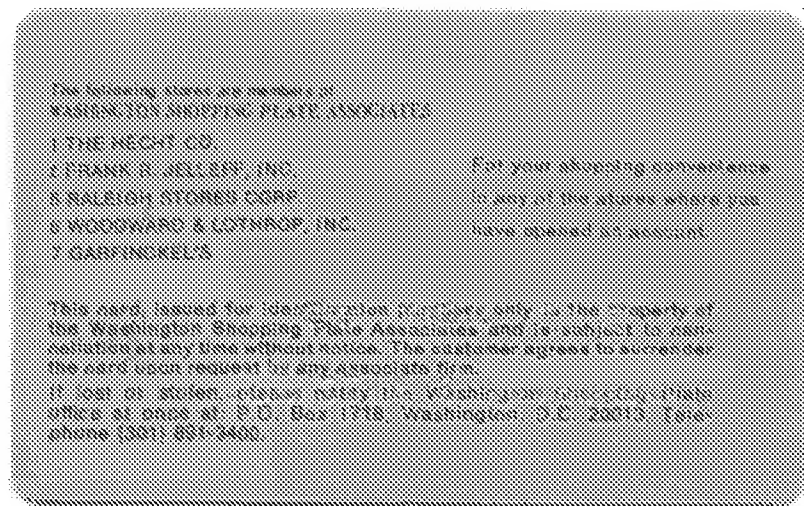
In those days, the store display windows were a place of wonderment, especially when the new fashions came out, or the holiday displays were turned on. No one looks at store windows downtown any more - they are full of nothing.

I remember the FIRST credit card I got in 1969, a Washington Shopping Plate*, good at the following major department stores:

- The Hecht Company
- Jelleffs
- Landsbergs
- Kanns
- Raleigh Haberdashery
- Woodward and Lothrop
- Garfinkels



One card, one number, the finest shops in Washington and the suburbs. They are now a thing of the past.



Now, thanks to the efforts of the Federated Department Stores, Hechts is being phased out, leaving none of the former plate members in existence. This is just of a continuation of a process that has taken the "Mom & Pop" out of the local neighborhoods, and replaced them with the face-less corporate behemoths who care not a whit about the soul of a community, but only the money to be had there.

I remember when there were 2 community stores in my neighborhood, one in the 800 block of 18th street, and one in the 800 block of 20th street - both gone. We had a hardware store on 23rd Street, a clothing store run by Mrs. Hyman, a drug store and several other stores - all long gone. If you want to shop now, you must go out of the neighborhood to where the stores are.

So, where will it end? If I could answer that, I would be a lot better off than I am now. Maybe we will end up with only one giant, big-brotherish store where everyone goes to buy what little there is. Maybe we will go back, after the behemoths have failed, to the day of the small entrepreneur, who knew what his neighbors wanted, and usually had it on the shelves.

So, watch this spot, and if I live long enough, I will update this page with the answer to the above questions.

* I still had my card as recently as six months ago (early 2005), but it is missing in action for the time being. The card above was provided by Conchita Mitchell, WSHS Class of '66. Her card is newer than mine, hence some of the stores are not listed, and some of their names have changed.

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The opinions expressed above are solely mine.

If you do not like them, oh well, you are probably part of the problem.

If you want information, use your E-Mail application to contact the author at:

humealumni@yahoo.com
